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THE GARDEN CALENDAR

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☆ JUN 19 1937 ☆
A radio discussion by W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm, Agriculture and Home Hour over the NBC radio network, Monday, June 7, 1937.

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Hello folks and thanks Mr. Everett. First I want to tell Everett Mitchell out at Chicago how much I appreciate their kind words on last Thursday about the little part I played in preparing those strawberries that Miss Van Deman carried with her to the Chicago studio. Miss Van Deman and I rather hesitated to attempt to transport the berries but we decided to apply the methods of picking and handling that are recommended by our transportation workers here in the horticultural division of the Department. To begin with the fruit was picked fully ripe but firm and was carefully gone over to see that every berry was sound. The berries were picked before they had a chance to become heated in the morning then were taken directly to the sorting and packing table then directly into a cooler in which the temperature was about 36 or 38 degrees. Here they were precooled until late afternoon when they were given their final packing ready for Miss Van Deman to carry them with her on the train to Chicago.

Our men have been working for years in an attempt to establish better methods of handling perishable fruits, especially strawberries and they have found that careful packing and precooling are very important if the berries are to arrive in good condition on the market. Recently I reported to you results of experiments in the precooling and handling of Florida strawberries but the result are just as striking when the methods are applied to the handling of berries that travel shorter distances. When fruit is packed and shipped while warm the organisms that cause decay work very rapidly, but by reducing the temperature just as soon as possible after the fruit is gathered the activity of the molds and rots that cause the fruit to decay is suddenly checked or at least slowed down so that little harm results.

A few years ago it was considered necessary to pick California cantaloupes practically green in order to get them to the eastern markets without undue losses. Now you often see the sign "Vine-ripened melons" on our markets and the growers are allowing the melons to reach the first stage of edible ripeness before gathering them. This has been made possible through the work of our transportation section and the quick removal of the heat from the melons either before or after they enter the car. Ordinary icing of the car is not sufficient to cool the melons quickly so the use of salt in conjunction with the ice has been resorted to in order to cool the melons quickly. At the second icing a smaller amount of salt is used and for the balance of the trip just plain ice is sufficient to keep the load cool. Of course there has been a big improvement in refrigerator care during recent years but this has all come about through consumer demand for a product that compares favorably with the best home-grown fruits and vegetables.

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And here is a pointer on sweet corn. You know that old saying "out of the garden and over the fire" as applied to roasting ears. A number of years ago there were numerous complaints regarding the quality of canned corn and our investigators found that the sugar content of sweet corn was reduced very rapidly between the time the ears were pulled from the stalks and the time that the corn was sealed in the cans. They found that this loss of quality was especially great in the case of loads of corn that remained standing on the wagons or trucks overnight, especially when the weather was warm. In other words the corn that was gathered early in the morning while it was cool and which was husked and canned before noon gave the sweetest and best product. It was natural to expect that this would be the case but the difference was even greater than anticipated.

Now the practical application of these results with sweet corn is to the effect that by keeping the ears of corn cool after they are gathered the flavor and sweetness may be retained. Corn that is placed in the refrigerator at a temperature of 36 or 38 degrees will retain its sweet flavor for several days. Ears of sweet corn that are gathered in the hot part of the afternoon and packed in sacks ready for the market the following morning will lose considerable of their sweetness and flavor during the night. If the corn could be gathered late in the evening after the air had cooled and kept cold during the night very little loss of flavor would result.

These and other experiments being conducted by our federal horticultural workers and the men in the States are constantly leading the way for better handling of our perishable fruits and vegetables. Well grown products are essential to start with but the best strawberries that were ever grown can be ruined by a couple of hours of exposure to the sun and wind. Your county agents and other State workers have access to the results of these experiments and can secure the information for you.

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